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ROSA BONHEUR.



HIS great painter of animals was born, March 16th, 1822, at Bordeaux, France; consequently is now in the fullness of vigor and most active in accomplishment. Her father, a painter of real genius, had four children, Rosalie, (Rosa) Auguste, Isidore, and Julietta, the mother being Sophie Marques, a lady of many accomplishments, and rare excellence of character. Poverty beset the family—the history of its struggles being a noble one, nevertheless. For the better support of his family, the father removed to Paris in 1829, but was very much driven to sustain even life itself, so difficult was it, in those revolutionary times, to find employ for pencil or pallet. The excellent mother taught music, however, and bought bread for her little ones. By and by came better times and better employ, and Raymond Bonheur found himself in a condition to do something for his children, whom he dearly loved. The boys he sent to school; but Rosa, the wild, restless, aimless girl, who would not study, but would persist in wandering all day long out into the fields and parks, was put to a dress-maker as apprentice, to learn how to do something. Here she indeed pined, grew ill, and so plead with her father, that he took her home again. There she was placed at school, and promised well for a time; but her roguish pranks and love of out-of-door life soon caused her return home once more. She had done nothing thus far but draw caricatures of her teachers with inimitable drollery and truthfulness. Not detecting the latent talent in his child, the father gave up in despair of ever making anything out of his restless yet loving child, and allowed her to do as her fancy pleased. Ah, how happy was she, then! All day long she staid in the studio, moulding images in clay, painting up the walls, sketching on the fair canvas prepared for her father's own touches. With a quick apprehension the truth flashed upon the parent's mind. He now entered zealously into her moods, put her through a severe preparatory course of study in drawing

and perspective, and then found that the romping, wandering child, had been a close student of Nature, for her pencil traced trees, grasses, skies, animals, water, with inimitable grace and real feeling. She pursued her studies devotedly, and was finally placed in the Louvre, to perfect, by copying the great master-pieces there, the lessons of the studio. Her progress was wonderful. Our authority says:

"Surrounded and stimulated by the glorious creations of the great painters, the first to enter the gallery, and last to leave it, and too much absorbed in her model to be conscious of anything that went on around her, Rosa pursued her labors with unwavering zeal. 'I have never seen an example of such application, and such ardor for work,' remarks M. Jouselin, Director of the Louvre, in describing the deportment of the young artist in her visits to that noble establishment. The splendid color and wealth of form of the Italian schools, the lofty idealism of the Germans, and the broad naturalism of the Dutch, alike excited her enthusiasm; she studied them all with equal interest, and copied them with equal felicity.

"To aid her father in his arduous struggle for the support of his family—now increased by the birth of two younger children—was the immediate object of Rosa's ambition; and the admirable fidelity of her copies insuring for them a speedy sale, this filial desire was soon gratified. She gained but a small sum for each; but so great was her industry that these earnings soon became an important item in the family resources.

"One day, when she had just put the finishing touch to a copy of *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, at the Louvre, an elderly English gentleman stopped beside her easel, and having examined her work with much attention, exclaimed: 'Your copy, *mon enfant*, is superb, faultless! Persevere as you have begun, and I prophecy that you will be a great artist!' The stranger's prediction gave the young painter much pleasure, and she went home that evening with her head full of joyous visions of future success."

And well might she rejoice, for she was then a great painter, though she knew it not. Yet she was not long in suspense, for the very next Exhibition saw her upon the walls in a performance, which enraptured connoisseurs and critics, and made her a name to command respect and—high prices for her works.

Want of space forbids that we should detail her now rapid progress to the proud position of one of the greatest of modern animal painters. From her first composition up to the celebrated "Horse Fair," her catalogue is one series of triumphs, too numerous for detail and particularization. While they betray great genius they also show the most ceaseless study in horse-stalls, cattle-sheds, slaughter-houses, sheep-pens, on the race-course—everywhere where animals were to be studied anatomically and *con amore*. Few women would dare to such study; but Rosa Bonheur knows no fear in her calm, self-reliant nature; and, an enthusiast in art, she studies where the best subjects offer. The results of such decision have been to place her beside Edwin Landseer, whose great fame the French *woman* bids fair to equal.

We have before us the records of a recent visit to Rosa's studio, and a description of her person and habits; and make no apology for laying the interesting account, at length, before our readers, as more pleasing than any mere data of pictures, dates and prices. The letter-writer says:

"At the southern end of the Rue d'Assas—half made up of extensive gardens, the tops of whose trees alone are visible above their high stone walls—just where this retired and quiet street, as it meets the Rue de Vaugirard, widens into a sort of irregular little square, surrounded by sleepy-looking old-fashioned houses, and looked down upon by the shining gray roofs and belfry of an ancient Carmelite convent, is a green garden door, surmounted by the number '32,' which door, though not in itself distinguishable from hundreds of other green doors in Paris, is yet especially interesting to lovers of art, as giving admission to the pleasant precincts of the *sanctum* from whose busy privacy have issued those *chef-d'œuvres* which have carried the name of the authoress of 'The Horse Market,' and 'Haymaking,' though the length and breadth of the civilized world, as the synonym of realistic vigor and poetic graces.

"Our ring at the bell being answered by the friendly barkings of one or two dogs, and the opening of the door by the sober-suited serving-man whom they accompany, we find ourselves in a garden full of embowering trees; the house itself—a long, cosy, irregular building, standing at right-angles with the street—being covered

with vines, honeysuckles, and clematis, from one end to the other.

"A part of the garden is laid out in flower-beds; but the greater portion of it—fenced off with a green paling, graveled, and containing several sheds—is given up to the animals kept by the artist as her models; an honor shared at the present time by a horse, a donkey, four or five goats and sheep of different breeds, ducks, cochin-chinas, and other denizens of the barn-yard, who live together in perfect amity and good will.

"On fine days, one sometimes finds the artist, in a wide-awake, or a sun-bonnet, seated on a rustic chair inside the paling, busily sketching some one of these animals; but more frequently—if we have taken care to present ourselves on a Friday afternoon, the only time when it is possible to gain access to the divinity of the place, invisible to mortal eyes during the rest of the week—we are ushered through glass doors into a hall, with paintings on the walls, orange trees and oleanders standing in green tubs in the corners, and the floor (since the artist crossed the Channel) covered with English oil-cloth. From this hall, a few stairs, simply covered with thick gray drugget, bring us to the *atelier*, which on Fridays is turned into a reception-room.

This beautiful studio, one of the largest and most finely proportioned in Paris, with its greenish gray walls, and plain green curtains to lofty windows that never let in daylight—the room being lighted entirely from the ceiling—is one of the most charming apartments anywhere to be found. All the wood-work is of dark oak, as are also the bookcase, tables, chairs, and other articles of furniture—richly carved, but otherwise of most severe simplicity—distributed about the room. The walls are covered with paintings, sketches, casts, old armor, fishing-nets, rude baskets and pouches, poles, gnarled and twisted vine branches, picturesque hats, cloaks, and sandals, collected by the artist in her wanderings among the peasants of various regions, nondescript draperies, bones and skins of animals, antlers and horns. The fine old bookcase contains fully as many casts, skeletons, and curiosities, as books, and is surmounted with as many busts, groups in plaster, shields, and other artistic booty, as its top can accommodate; and the great gothic-looking stove, at the upper end of the room, is covered in the same way with little casts and bronzes.

Paintings of all sizes, and in every stage of progress, are seen on easels at the lower end of the room, our artist always working at several at a time. Stands of portfolios, and stacks of canvas line the sides of the studio; birds are chirping in cages of various dimensions, and a magnificent parrot eyes you suspiciously from the top of a lofty perch. Scattered over the floor—as bright as waxing can make it—are skins of tigers, oxen, leopards and foxes; the only species of floor-covering admitted by the artist into her workroom.

"‘They give me ideas,’ she says of these favorite appurtenances, ‘whereas the most costly and luxurious carpet is suggestive of nothing.’

"Such is the ‘whereabout’ in which Rosa Bonheur receives her guests, with the frankness, kindness, and unaffected simplicity, for which she is so eminently distinguished. She is small in person, rather under middle height, with a finely-formed head, and a broad rather than a high forehead; well-defined, regular features, and good teeth; hazel eyes, very clear and bright, and dark brown hair, slightly wavy, parted on one side, and cut short in the neck; a compact, shapely figure; true artist’s hands, small, delicate, and nervous, and extremely pretty little feet. She dresses very plainly, the only colors worn by her being black, brown, or gray, and her costume consisting invariably of close-fitting jacket and skirt of simple materials. On the rare occasions when she goes into company—for she lives very retiredly, accepting but few of the innumerable invitations with which she is assailed—she wears the same simple costume, of richer materials, with the addition merely of a lace collar. She wears none of the usual articles of feminine adornment, not from contempt of them, but simply because the elegant trifles so dear to womankind are so utterly foreign to her thoughts and occupations, that even to put them on would be a false and unnatural proceeding. When at her easel, she wears a sort of round pinafore, or *blouse*, of gray linen, that envelops her from the neck to the feet.

"Rosa Bonheur impresses you, at first sight, as a clear, honest, vigorous, independent nature; abrupt, yet kindly; original, self-centred, and decided, without the least pretention or conceit; but it is only when you have seen her conversing earnestly and heartily, her enthusiasm roused by some topic connected with her

art, or with the great humanitarian questions of the day, when you have watched her kindling eye, her smile at once so sweet, so beaming, and so keen, her expressive features, irradiated, as it were, with an inner light, that you begin to perceive how very beautiful she really is.

To know how upright and how truthful she is, how single-minded in her devotion to her art, how simple and unassuming—fully conscious of the dignity of her artistic power, but respecting it rather as a talent committed to her keeping than as a quality personal to herself—you must also have been admitted to something more than the ordinary courtesy of a reception day, while, if you would know how nobly and self-sacrificingly generous she has been, not only to her own family, but to others possessing no claim on her kindness but such as that kindness gave them, you must learn it from those who have shared her bounty, for you will never know a word of it from herself. In the amplest biography of a living celebrity, much that would show the nobleness of a character in the most striking light cannot, for obvious reasons, be given to the public; and in the case of the artist of whose life the present sketch will offer a brief outline, her rooted dislike to being written about will continue to prevent many interesting particulars from becoming known, which might otherwise have fallen under the pens of industrious biographers. But should the intention of writing, for publication after her death, a memoir that shall really set forth the inner, personal life of the artist, be carried into execution by perhaps the only person who, from her position, and her long and intimate connection with the minutest details of the artist’s life, is competent to do justice to the subject, those who come after us will learn, from the instructive lessons of a life replete with noble teachings, that the great painter whose fame will go down to coming ages as one of the brightest glories of the present, was as admirable as a woman as she was gifted as an artist, and that her moral worth was no less transcendent than her genius.

Pay not before thy work is done; if thou dost, ’twill never be well done; and thou’lt have but a pennyworth for two pence.

The more grand and noble a man is in his actions, the more simple he ought to be in his conversation and manners.